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Hi Keith,

I am presuming on our past association to seek your comments on an AIF matter. Hope you don't mind.

I have previously mentioned my late Uncle Harold Stevens, and in doing family history I am trying to piece together what he did during his time in the Army, and to record a summary of this in layman's language.

I have obtained from Australian Archives copies of Harold's service records, but as you will know, much of the hand written comments are cryptic to the uninitiated. So I thought I would extract some of these, and ask an expert like you to translate for me. First of all a bit of background.

At age 41 on 8 July 1941 Harold joined 5 Army Troops at Coburg Victoria as a Carpenter. From then until 14/4/42 he worked at places such as Geelong, Ballarat, Mangalore, Coburg and was promoted in succession Corporal, Sergeant and Staff Sergeant. Then :

1. Hand written entry on his Service And Casualty Form reads "7/8/42 Detached to SME School Liverpool." I have a photo of a group with Harold included, and on the back of the photo is hand written "S.M.E. (TD) Liverpool No 4 Section course 56 Aug 4 - Nov 28". Not recorded but this must have been 1942.

So the first question is, do you know what this course was?

2. He was transferred to the AIF 11/11/1942. The next entry reads "22/12/42 Rejoined unit from SME Liverpool", and the unit is shown as 5 ATC. So presumably he went back to Melbourne. Then the following entries are a real mess but it looks like he embarked 16/6/43 on a ship Charon, arrived Townsville, then carried on to Milne Bay arriving 20/6/43. No further entry until 15/9/43 which states "5 (??) Coy, Detach to 73 DCRE (??) but possibly workshops.

So second question is what was 73 DCRE?

2. Harold remained in New Guinea until 1/6/44 when he was returned to Brisbane. During the period 15/9/43 through to 1/6/44 there are entries which refer to "ADCS NGF", and "13 AACS (looks like) Club."

So third question is, what were ADCS NGF, and 13 AACS Club?

4. Back in Australia until his discharge 18/12/44, there are entries which read "AACS Qld Det", "1 Aus CE Wks", "Rec Lia", "G.O.D. Qld".

Last question, can you translate any of these?

Keith, I guess what I'd really like to find out is what sort of occupation did he have in New Guinea, and what was the umbrella unit he belonged to. Clearly he was too old for combat activities, and I would guess he was involved in construction and/or maintenance activities. He would not have belonged to an infantry battalion or artillery brigade, so what sort of unit would it have been, and importantly for me, what would his colour patch have looked like.

Now I know I am asking a lot of you, but if you are unable to help, maybe you can refer me to published books which I can obtain and study to get some answers.

Cheers

George Stevens

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Dear George,

Hope this finds you well. Amen to your comments re Sydney and sorry the move is necessary. I first visited the place as an impressionable 18 year old soldier in the mid 1970's and came away with such an unfavourable impression that I have never been back since. However I have no doubt that I will visit one day, I need to see the Artillery Museum at North Head.

If you've been down to Tassie 15 times you must be impressed with the place. I came here 20 odd years ago and haven't seen any reason to leave. The only drawback is the 600 kms or so of Bass Strait which stops you jumping in your car and heading off to the next capital city to dive into their archives offices.

Enclosed is a sheet of paper on the movements, etc, of 5 Aust. Army Troops Company, the current phone number of its reunion organizer, and a summary of the questions you've asked in your letter. I hope that it will provide what you need.

Question 1.

S.M.E. (TD). S.M.E. stood for School of Military Engineering, it still exists today in the same spot I think with the same role. It covered all sorts of subjects related to engineering, gas warfare, bomb disposal, etc. I would suggest that TD stood for Technical Drawing and as a staff sergeant Harold was probably an Assistant Foreman of Works or similar and would have had to be familiar with site plans, drawing up of plans, etc. You know what carpenters are like, couple of lines scrawled on a scrap of paper with a stub of pencil, probably wouldn't have been sufficient for planning and building a barracks or coast artillery emplacement, etc, which is what those blokes did.

Question 2.

73 D.C.R.E. Stands for 73rd Aust. Deputy Commander Royal Engineers (Works). A D.C.R.E. was a staff which was responsible for planning and overseeing engineer works projects in a base or line of communication sub-area, concerned with design and planning, allocating the job amongst the units available, utilisation of labour and assets, etc. These projects would have covered things such as road-building, wharves, buildings, etc, in the area covered by it. It appears that Harold was attached to this staff from his own unit for a particular purpose and would have returned to it at the end of that project. It probably should show in his AAB83 when he returned to his unit.

Question 3.

A.D.C.S. N.G.F., etc. This stands for Australian Defence Canteens Service, New Guinea Force, and was later redesignated the Aust. Army Canteens Service. This was the organization responsible for providing canteen amenities to the troops, places where they could buy tobacco, matches, stationery, etc, that wasn't provided in the daily scale of rations. 13 A.A.C.S. Club was 13 Aust. Army Canteens Services Club, it was for other ranks I imagine and probably only served beer. Officers clubs would have served spirits and nurses would have been allowed to attend. Canteens needed buildings, secure storage facilities, refrigeration and the like and I guess Harold was probably attached to these units in an advisory capacity.

Question 4.

Aust. Army Canteens Service, Queensland Detachment, explanation as above. 1st Aust. Chief Engineer (Works) was the senior engineer works staff in the Queensland area, responsible for the overseeing of all engineer projects in the line of communication area, there would have been several D.C.R.E. (Wks) under its control, each itself responsible for a certain sub-area. G.O.D. should probably read G.D.D. and would be General Details Depot, Queensland. This unit was responsible for holding personnel in transit to a new unit or a school or course, or returning to their old unit from school, hospital or detention barracks, or awaiting discharge. Harold was probably posted to G.D.D. Qld for onward movement to G.D.D. Victoria which was his state of enlistment and was usually the state of discharge. "Rec Lia" is unknown to me, Rec is the abbreviation for Recreation, Reception or Recruiting, maybe Lia is Liaison?

In summary it would appear that Harold was employed in a supervisory and advisory role for building or construction projects in New Guinea and Queensland during the war. Quite possibly he was a Foreman of Works or similar and supervised native labour or work parties from employment or works companies of the Australian army. His colour patch would have been No. 661 in my book but you could confirm that with the unit reunion organizer. It was actually 4 Army Tps Coy I contacted all those years ago not 5 Army Tps Coy.

Best Regards

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of stylized, overlapping loops and a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

- Attached:
1. Newspaper clipping from "Herald" of 24 Apr 03 with ph. no. of reunion organizer for 5 A Tps Coy.
 2. Brief notes on formation, role, location and movements of 5th Aust. Army Troops Company, R.A.E.

5th Australian Army Troops Company, Royal Australian Engineers

Role:

An army troops company, R.A.E., was an engineer works unit for base and line of communication areas, organized with skilled carpenters, electricians, plasterers, concreters, etc, and built or repaired buildings, wharves, bridges, gun emplacements, operated water supply points, electrical power supply, etc. I think these days they are known as construction squadrons. *Also had a bomb disposal role in some areas.*

History:

5th Army Troops Company was raised in Victoria on 27th November 1940 as a unit of the Citizen Military Forces and became 5th Aust. Army Troops Company on 29th May 1942. The unit moved to Queensland on 11th August 1942 and to New Guinea on 26th April 1943. It commenced returning to Australia on 22nd February 1945 from Bougainville and went to Singapore on 27th August 1945. I presume it to have been disbanded early in 1946 because it does not appear in the Order of Battle of the Australian Army that I hold from late 1946.

It was redesignated 5th Aust. Army Troops Company (Australian Imperial Force) in March 1944, this meant that 75% of its members (or more) had volunteered for unrestricted service overseas. You could tell if this included Harold because his army number would start with VX. If it does not this is possibly the reason he returned to Australia in June 1944 because his age would then have been 44 and he would have generally been considered overage for the A.I.F.

I have been unable to ascertain where exactly in New Guinea, Queensland and Victoria the unit served but it probably had parties detached everywhere on different jobs at any one time. Certainly it did not take part in any of the major campaigns in the New Guinea area but that would be expected because it was a line of communication area unit not a front-line field engineer unit. I imagine Bob Jones will be able to fill you in on all the good guff regarding their areas of service.

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